

PROCEEDINGS OF THE HISTORIC CONSERVATION BOARD

MONDAY, June 9, 2003

3:00 P.M., J. MARTIN GRIESEL ROOM, CENTENNIAL PLAZA II

The Historic Conservation Board met at 3:00 P.M., in the J. Martin Griesel Room, Centennial Plaza II, with members Kreider, Raser, Senhauser, Spraul-Schmidt, Sullebarger and Wallace present. Absent: Bloomfield, Borys and Clement.

MINUTES

The minutes of the Monday, May 19, 2003 meeting were unanimously approved as amended (motion by Spraul-Schmidt, second by Sullebarger).

CERTIFICATE OF APPROPRIATENESS, 2777 BAKER PLACE, EAST WALNUT HILLS HISTORIC DISTRICT

Staff member Adrienne Cowden presented the staff report on a request for a Certificate of Appropriateness for the construction of a detached garage at 2777 Baker Place, a contributing building in the East Walnut Hills Historic District. Ms. Cowden suggested that the design might better meet historic district guidelines if the windows were multi-paned as the residence. She reported that no zoning variances were required if the property lines were redrawn as proposed. She said the East Walnut Hills Assembly had reviewed the project and did not object.

BOARD ACTION

The Board voted unanimously (motion by Sullebarger, second by Raser) to take the following actions:

1. Find that the proposed new garage meets the East Walnut Hills Historic District guidelines with the condition that multi-light sash be installed in the east elevation windows; and
2. Approve a Certificate of Appropriateness with the condition that the final construction drawings and landscape plans shall be submitted to the Urban Conservator for approval prior to construction.

CERTIFICATE OF APPROPRIATENESS AND ZONING VARIANCES, 1895 AND 1899 MADISON ROAD, EAST WALNUT HILLS HISTORIC DISTRICT

Staff member Adrienne Cowden presented the staff report on a request for a Certificate of Appropriateness for the construction of two single-family residences on existing lots at 1895 and 1899 Madison Road. The properties are located within the East Walnut Hills Historic District in an area zoned R-1 (Single-Family Low Density). Although a single-family brick residence and carriage house once occupied 1895 Madison, the buildings have been demolished and both lots are currently vacant. Ms. Cowden circulated a letter from the Cincinnati Preservation Association with suggested changes to the designs. She also reported that the East Walnut Hills Assembly opposed the current design.

This application was first heard by the Board on May 19, 2003 and was tabled to give the applicant an opportunity to consider design changes suggested at that meeting. Ms. Cowden indicated that comments from the Board and the East Walnut Hills Assembly

have been incorporated into the present proposal, but characterized the changes as essentially cosmetic. Changes included using different materials and architectural details on the two residences; however, the plan, massing, height and scale are the same on both buildings. Although the houses have been moved farther back from Madison Road, zoning variances are still required for side yard setbacks and front yard parking on each property.

Mr. Senhauser questioned why it would be appropriate to grant the required zoning variance when the Board had denied front yard parking in an adjoining block. He suggested that the need for the variance would not be avoided with alterations to the design. Mr. Kreider was still concerned about the loss of mature trees from the site. Mr. Raser suggested that if the garages were detached in the rear of the lots, no variances would be required and the houses would fit better in the neighborhood.

Mr. Robert Sala, project architect, was present to answer questions from the Board. Mr. Sala said that he had revised the designs based on earlier comments from the community and the Board. Although the two buildings share a common floor plan, one has been detailed as a Neo-Classical residence and the other as a Craftsman. The Board said that attached garages with street-facing doors are not characteristic of the district and suggested that a basement garage or a separate garage attached by a breezeway might be considered. Mr. Sala responded that market studies show that comparable, non-historic properties offer such amenities. He emphasized that the integrity of original design with identical twins has been diluted in an attempt to make the two buildings distinct, as requested by the neighbors, CPA and the Assembly.

Sally Wilson of 1901 Madison Road was opposed to granting any zoning variances for the project, as this would set a precedent for the neighborhood. She said she was aware that the site contained two legal lots, but nonetheless felt that two houses were inappropriate. Ms. Wilson said the garage of 1899 Madison was too close to Baker Place (opposite her house) and objected to the disruption that new construction would cause on the street.

Holden Wilson of 3312 Church Street, Cincinnati 45244 said he grew up at 1909 Madison and that the new construction was objectionable. He expressed concerns about the multi-level garage at 1899 and the loss of trees on the site. Mr. Holden said that spec houses do not deserve zoning variances.

Ken Segal of 1433 McMillan introduced himself as a developer, member of the East Walnut Hills Assembly and former board member of CPA. He described the proposed houses as suburban in their interchangeability in an historic district that values individuality in design. He objected to the street-facing garage doors and front yard parking. Mr. Segal said that zoning variances should not be granted for inappropriate designs that the historic district was formed to prohibit.

Susan Haas, real estate broker and long-term resident of 3018 Wold Avenue, said that the concept of a common plan with different facades and attached front-facing garages was characteristic of middle class suburban housing and should not be permitted in this up-scale neighborhood. She said this and other recent new construction has caused disruption and dissent in the neighborhood.

Joseph Balbo of 1359 Flemming Street indicated that the identical houses were wrong for the district and that the applicant should not be looking to other communities for comparable houses.

Owner Robert Chavez said that he had hoped to build the two houses for his niece and nephew, but his nephew had withdrawn. They are similar in form to others on the street, with clay tile roofs but without fake historical trim. He said the patio wall was necessary for privacy and the street-facing garage doors address the traffic problems on Madison Road and preserve backyard space for families.

Mr. Kreider asked whether Mr. Chavez would consider relocating the garages either to the basement or detached in the rear. He suggested the house at 1899 be turned to face onto Baker Place. Mr. Senhauser said that the Board was at something of an impasse. It recognized Mr. Chavez's right to build on the lots, but could not justify the required variances. He said the two residences should relate to their different conditions and their prototypical uniformity was uncharacteristic of the high-style district.

Mr. Kreider said the issue was not of two houses, but the front-facing garage, the variances required and the loss of mature landscaping. Mr. Raser said the two houses should be different, that they should be more vertical in proportion and set back further from Madison Road. Mr. Chavez agreed that he and his architect could resolve these issues.

BOARD ACTION

The Board voted unanimously (motion by Sullebarger, second by Spraul-Schmidt) to table the application to give the applicant an opportunity to address the issues raised at the meeting and by correspondence submitted.

ZONING VARIANCE, 1761 SYCAMORE STREET, OVER-THE-RHINE (NORTH) HISTORIC DISTRICT

Staff member Caroline Kellam presented the staff report on a request for zoning variances for side and rear yard setbacks in the R-6 Multi-Family High-Density Zoning District. Ms. Kellam reminded the Board that it had approved the rehabilitation of this structure on December 9, 2002. The owner now seeks to divide the two-family residence into two units on independent lots. This is a zoning variance request only; no new work is proposed.

The subdivision of this single building will result in two parcels – one at 1761 Sycamore (Parcel A, the half facing east onto Sycamore Street) and a second unnumbered lot (Parcel B, facing south on Seitz Street). 1761 Sycamore will require a zoning variance for a zero setback rear yard. The Seitz Street property will require a zoning variance for a zero setback side yard and a zero setback rear yard (its former northern side yard). The variances will permit the halves to be sold as fee simple properties and facilitate mortgage financing.

Owner John Coulter was present to answer questions from the Board. Mr. Coulter confirmed that the southern portion of the site will likely be developed as parking, but had no specific plan at present. Mr. Senhauser said he understood the applicant's desire to subdivide the property, but lamented the loss of a corner lot which closed the possibility of a new structure that might anchor the block.

BOARD ACTION

The Board voted unanimously (motion by Raser, second by Sullebarger) to take the following actions:

1. Grant a variance to permit zero rear yard setbacks for Parcels A and B as per Section 1417-400 (f) (4) of the Cincinnati Zoning Code.
2. Grant a variance to permit a zero least width side yard setback and zero sum of side yard setbacks on Parcel A as per Section 1419-400 (f) (2) and (3) of the Cincinnati Zoning Code.
3. Grant a variance to permit a zero least width side yard setback on Parcel B as per Section 1419-400 (f) (2) of the Cincinnati Zoning Code.
4. Find that such relief from the literal interpretation of the Zoning Code:
 - a) Is necessary and appropriate in the interest of historic conservation so as not to adversely affect the historic architectural or aesthetic character of the district; and
 - b) Will not be materially detrimental to the public health, safety, and welfare or injurious to the property in the district or vicinity where the property is located.

PRELIMINARY DESIGN REVIEW, 543-547 LIBERTY HILL, PROSPECT HILL HISTORIC DISTRICT

Staff member Caroline Kellam summarized for the Board the primary materials and design characteristics of a proposal for three new town houses on steeply sloping lots at 543-547 Liberty Hill within the Prospect Hill Historic District. She pointed out that it will be necessary for the owner to secure a vacation of a public right-of-way and reconfigure the existing lots. Zoning variances for property line setbacks will likely be required. Ms. Kellam said that although it will not be formally notified until a hearing for a Certificate is scheduled, the Prospect Hill Neighborhood Association has reviewed the plans and finds them acceptable.

(Mr. Kreider left the meeting)

Don Beck property owner and project architect was present to further describe the proposed project and answer questions from the Board. He acknowledged that the garages face the street, but are recessed 18 feet behind the living spaces at the front property line and have lower slopes than the main mass of the houses. This establishes a rhythm of solids and voids and provides space for additional off-street parking. Additionally, landscaping will soften the streetscape; existing hardwood trees will not be affected.

Ms. Sullebarger suggested the cornice line be made uniform over the body of the houses and their projecting bays and questioned the appropriateness of the corner turret on the end unit. In response to Ms. Spraul-Schmidt, Mr. Beck said although it breaks the street pattern, the two-car garage on the end unit is a marketing consideration. Mr. Raser said he thought the garage visually needed a second floor and the window and door openings should have delineated heads and sills. Ms. Wallace suggested that the driveway surface be softened to work with the brick sidewalks. Mr. Senhauser said that he thought the rhythm of solids and voids worked well as a whole, but the spacing required for the two-

car on the end unit was disruptive. He suggested that the garage be narrowed for tandem parking. Mr. Beck responded that the end unit had been designed to a specific client's need.

BOARD ACTION

No official action was required of the Board.

ADJOURNMENT

As there were no other items for consideration by the Board, the meeting adjourned.

William L. Forwood
Urban Conservator

John C. Senhauser
Chairman

Date